Detraining:

How long does it take to get out of shape?

So, you've gotten busy with work and family responsibilities, and you've missed your workout for a few weeks. At one point in time, it's happened to the best of us. What does this mean to your personal exercise training process? Now, you're ready to focus on your workout sessions, but since you've missed a few workout weeks, at what intensity should you begin your workouts?

"Detraining refers to the physiological and performance adaptations that occur when an individual ceases an exercise training program. These changes are the exact opposite of what occurs during training programs, and the Sailor regresses toward his or her condition prior to starting the program. The National Strength and Conditioning Association states that after 2 weeks, the muscular strength is only slightly changed. It's the muscular endurance piece (aerobic conditioning) that decreases dramatically in 2 weeks. Once exercising stops, Sailors maintain their benefits from participating in a weekly muscular strength training program much longer than maintain benefits from aerobic training (1).

MUSCULAR STRENGTH: There is relatively little research on the detraining process with resistance training as compared to the training process, so the rapidity of the detraining process is poorly understood. However, short term detraining (14 days) appears to have little effect on muscle strength and explosive power in experienced resistance-trained athletes and recreational strength trainers, suggesting that the effects are comparatively slow. Extended detraining (32 weeks) did result in significant decreases in muscle strength in previously resistance-trained individuals, but values were still above pre-training levels. The effects of detraining can be signif[illegible] of just one to two training sessions per week; Sailors w[illegible] busy or difficult schedules may maintain a certain leve[illegible] strength by training once or twice a week (1).

AEROBIC CONDITIONING: Once exercise is stopped, muscular endurance decreases after only 2 weeks! The ways in which the body responds to detraining are similar in the ways in which it responds to training. One study showed reductions in the muscl[illegible] respiratory ability as well as in muscle glycogen over a four week period, along with an increase in lactate, wh[illegible] demonstrates obvious changes in the muscle metabol[illegible] (2) When re-starting an aerobic conditioning program (even after only 2 weeks), it is important to gradually increase the intensity and duration of training to preve[illegible] injury. If you've quit training for a few weeks, graduall[illegible] work back up to your regular training status.

MAINTAINING FITNESS: To view the latest national physical activity guidelines released by the American College of Sports Medicine and the American Heart Association, visit the NEHC Physical Fitness Homepage at http://www.nehc.med.navy.mil/hp//downloads/Fitness/NewNationalPhysicalGuidelin